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ABSTRACT

This document reviews research concerning the factors affecting premarital sexual attitudes and behaviors of adolescents and young adults. Trends in the literature prior to 1980 are discussed briefly together with summaries of literature reviews from the decades of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Studies from 1980 to the present are reviewed in some detail, emphasizing the following determinants of premarital sex in adolescents and young people: parental influence; peer influence; personality and self-perception; religiosity; affective components; educational and cultural factors; and gender differences. It is concluded that: (1) there has been an overall increase in the permissiveness in premarital sexual behavior, as well as a steady decline in the age of first intercourse; (2) there is a strong suspicion that the rise in sexual permissiveness among adolescents and young adults may be due increasingly to a split between personal attitudes or beliefs and actual behavior; and (3) gender alone is no longer a distinguishing factor in premarital sexual behavior, although women appear to endorse more traditional attitudes than men. It is concluded that these results point to the importance of sex education both at the behavioral and attitudinal levels. Finally, it is recommended that there is a need for children to be given explicit training concerning development of healthy attitudes toward sexual behavior. (BHK)

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PREMARITAL SEXUAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS: A REVIEW OF CURRENT LITERATURE

A Doctoral Research Paper

Presented to

the Faculty of the Rosemead School of Psychology

Biola University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Psychology

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by

Bruce Eric Turnquist

May 1991

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ABSTRACT

PREMARITAL SEXUAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS: A REVIEW OF CURRENT LITERATURE

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Research concerning factors affecting premarital sexual attitudes and behavior of adolescents and young adults is reviewed. Trends in the literature prior to 1980 are discussed briefly together with summaries of literature reviews from the decades of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Studies from 1980 to the present are reviewed in some detail emphasizing the following determinants of premarital sex in adolescents and young people: (a) parental influence, (b) peer influence, (c) personality and self-perception, (d) religiosity, (d) affective components, (e) educational and cultural factors, and (f) gender differences. Research on the effects of trends relating to these determinants is reviewed and summarized and the author offers his conclusions based on the implications of the research for future studies.

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PREMARITAL SEXUAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS: A REVIEW OF CURRENT LITERATURE

Introduction

In the past 30 years there has been a steadily increasing body of research in the United States on the topic of premarital sex. This increase can be traced in the number of studies published as well as in the variety of focal issues they have addressed. Each decade is characterized by a continuation of trends from the previous decade, as well as by its own trendsetting attitudes and behaviors.

The focus of this paper is on the published research from 1980 to the present concerned with underlying determinants of sexual attitudes and behaviors in adolescents and young adults. Also considered are several studies concerning the effects of these determinants in fueling attitudes toward marriage. Because of their importance to the discussion of the research and as a means of putting the current research in context, this paper begins with a survey of selected literature reviews of certain trends already observed prior to 1980.

Trends Observed in Pre-1980 Reviews of the Literature

Some of the most influential research on premarital sexual behavior was conducted by Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) and by Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, and Gebhard (1953). Using for their 1948 study extensive interview data obtained from 5,300 male subjects and for their 1953 study data from 5,940 female subjects, Kinsey and his associates were able to

provide comprehensive information concerning the sexual behavior and attitudes of young people of that era. Before the appearance of the reports of Kinsey's landmark research, the most frequently cited study of premarital sexual attitudes and behavior was that of Terman (1938).

Using a group-administered questionnaire and a subject pool of 792 couples, Terman found that 49.4% of husbands born before 1890 and 84.4% of those born after 1910 reported having engaged in premarital sex. Terman reported less premarital sexual activity among women born before 1910, that is, 13.5% of female subjects, but in contrast an astonishing 68.3% of those born after 1910. Although Kinsey et al. (1948) stated that their findings did not support the rapid increase in sexual activity found in Terman's study, In the Kinsey research, 68% of men reported having had premarital sex by age 18, 77% by age 22, and 92% by age 38, figures which seem to lend some support to the accuracy of Terman's findings.

Overall, the research prior to 1980 indicated an increase in premarital sexual activity as well as increased permissiveness about such behavior (Earle & Perricone, 1986; Spees, 1987). Masters, Johnson, and Kolodny (1985) reported not only increased frequency of sexual intercourse before marriage, but also a decline in the age of occurrence of first intercourse (see Table 1). In 1953, only 3% of 15 year old girls and 20% of 20 year old women claimed to be nonvirgins (Kinsey et al., 1953). Sorenson (1973), however, found 35% of 13 to 15 year old girls and 57% of 16 to 19 year old women had had sexual intercourse at least once. Similarly, Zelnick and Kantner (1980) reported a nearly two-thirds increase in the prevalence of premarital sexual intercourse in teenage American women between 1971 and 1979.

A significant trend was also observed in the heightened permissiveness of attitude toward the acceptability of premarital sex. A recent Gallup Report

indicated that 24% of adults polled in 1968 felt that premarital sexual activity was acceptable behavior; by 1985 the figure had risen to 58% ("For the First Time," 1985). There seems to have been a moderate disregard for traditional mores and an increased focus on individuals maintaining personal privacy in regard to the nature of their sexual behavior (Spees, 1987). Although Reiss (1967) had suggested that permissiveness with affection was the rising norm among college students, the research of the 1970s seemed to point

Table 1

Percent of Unmarried American Teenage Females with Coital Experience

	STUDY			
Age	Kinsey et al. (1953)	Sorenson (1973)	Zelnik & Kantner (1980) [1971]	[1979]
13	1	9	-	-
14	2	15	-	-
15	3	26	14	23
16	5	35	21	38
17	9	37	26	49
18	14	45	40	57
19	17		46	69

Note: From Human Sexuality (p. 236) by W.H. Masters, V.R. Johnson, and R.C. Kolodny, 1985, Boston: Little, Brown. Copyright 1985 by William H. Masters, Virginia E. Johnson, and Robert C. Kolodny. Reprinted by permission

to this as true only within certain parameters. Earle and Perricone (1986) found that in general university students displayed an attitude of permissiveness toward sexual activity, though for women it appeared to be directly related to a need for intimacy in the relationship before agreeing to such activity.

In comparing attitudinal and behavioral trends prior to 1980, there is a strong indication of some kind of ambivalence. There has been an increasing convergence in the attitudes of men and women in respect to their mutual acceptance of premarital sex. On the one hand there seems to have been a decreasing attitude of acceptance of sexual permissiveness, while on the other actual incidence of sexual behavior among young people has been increasing significantly (Laner & Housker, 1980; Spees, 1987). Thus, for both sexes the ambivalence is seen in attitudes discouraging permissiveness while at the same time both genders are engaging increasingly in sexual activity. In surveys 14 years apart on the sexual attitudes and behaviors of college students (Robinson, King, Dudley, & Clune, 1968; Robinson & Jedlicka, 1982), the investigators found an apparently new gender determined moral code. That is, the research indicated subjects reported permissiveness in sexual behavior on the part of self and others of the same sex, while at the same time reporting an attitude of restrictive permissiveness for those of the opposite sex.

Gender-based differences relating to premarital sex have surfaced in the research, but the degree of differences appeared to have become considerably less in the 1970s compared to previous decades (Barrett, 1980). Thus, the gap Kinsey et al. (1948, 1953) had once noted between the premarital sexual behavior of men and women was closing (Laner & Housker, 1980; Robinson,

1982). Earle and Perricone (1986) found that the differences between men and women in the 1970s existed more in attitude than in actual behavior. Although women were virtually identical to men in the degree to which they engaged in premarital sexual activity, unlike males they continued to report more traditional attitudes regarding its acceptability.

Also related to these more traditional attitudes, Robinson and Jedlicka (1982) found an increase among both men and women of the view that premarital sex is sinful or immoral. However, contradictory findings showed that 40% of adults who considered themselves highly religious also considered premarital sex to be acceptable (For the First Time, 1980). The disparity in such findings is perhaps best explained by differences in methods for measuring religiosity, a factor of such importance that it is discussed further on in this review.

In comparing determinants of premarital sexual behavior, Jurich (1979) concluded that such factors as environment, influence of peers and cognitive development are interrelated, but in varying proportions for each individual. Thus, no one factor stood out clearly as predominant in premarital sexual decision-making. However, it has also been found that since 1985 fear of AIDS has emerged as a factor among college students in respect to making decisions about engaging in sexual activity (Spees, 1987).

Methodologically, there has been a marked increase in the rigor with which the research concerning premarital sex has been conducted (Chilman, 1980; Clayton & Bokemeier, 1980). An increase of rigor is noted particularly in the areas of theory and theory-focused research. Clayton and Bokemeier (1980) found that the larger number of studies adhered to Reiss' (1967) "autonomy theory" in dealing with the social variables that impact premarital sexual permissiveness. In criticizing the various studies, Clayton

and Bokemeier discusssed the research related to each of the propositions that are part of Reiss' theory and suggested the difficulties they saw in them. Although beyond the scope of this paper, Reiss' theory deserves mention, if only in passing, because of the attention it has received in the literature on premarital sexual attitudes and behaviors.

Chilman (1980) made the interesting observation that there had been a substantial increase in federal spending for sex research with the larger portion of the research focused on the premarital sexual attitudes and behaviors of women. This Chilman considered to be a continuation of what she perceived to be a decided sexist trend in premarital sex research.

In summary, the research on premarital sex prior to 1980 has shown a trend toward increased permissiveness in sexual activity together with vacillating or ambivalent attitudes toward the acceptability of premarital sex. Research on premarital sex dating from the late 1800s to the present has shown steady improvement in methodological rigor as well as in sharper focus on theoretical ideas.

Methodological Issues

A trend toward greater robustness in the methodological rigor of the research relating to premarital sexual attitudes and behavior was first noted in the 1970s, and was carried over into the 1980s. In reviewing the research from the 1980s, there are important issues regarding research methods to point out before discussing the results of studies on premarital sexual attitudes and behaviors. The weight assigned to any conclusion from research depends upon the researcher's efforts to rule out experimental error in a given line of investigation and possible threats to validity issues in the study. The following section provides a discussion of methodological

issues that have emerged from the current literature on premarital sex. Only selected studies have been drawn on to illustrate the issues and consequently not all pertinent studies are considered.

Sampling Procedures

As in any piece of research, not the least of which is research on premarital sexual attitudes and behaviors, sampling procedures assume central importance. Because of the prevalence of survey data in sex research, the ideal is a probability sample, that is, a sample in which theoretically all persons within the total population have an equal chance of being included in the limited sample. However, Crooks and Baur (1987) suggested that the sensitive nature of sex research mitigates against achieving a probability sample because of a typically high nonresponse rate. Nonresponse bias was noted in a study by Lane and Gwartney-Gibbs (1985) in which results of a self-administered questionnaire were based on a 55% response rate. The level of nonresponses created a significant imbalance in the representativeness of the sample. Therefore, the data had to be weighted statistically in order to compensate for the imbalance and deal satisfactorily with the representativeness issue. The difficulty produced by nonresponse bias is that researchers cannot account fully for the nonresponse group and thus in addressing the issue must use statistical correction as their only recourse.

A common means of dealing with the issues related to survey samples is using data from a large, nationally drawn probability sample. For instance, Brown (1985) used a portion of a previously drawn national sample (Zelnick & Kantner, 1981) in his study of sexual permissiveness among Black adolescent females. National samples have the advantage of being used to provide data for numerous, group-focused studies. A further

example of the use of a national probability sample is found in a study conducted by Hofferth, Kahn, and Baldwin (1987) in which three decades of data on sexual activity in teenage women was obtained through the National Survey of Family Growth.

Volunteer bias is a related issue in respect to sampling procedures. Volunteer bias is the systematic difference that may exist between between persons who freely volunteer for sex research as opposed to those who decline, or who participate only under some form of pressure or expectation. Masters et al. (1985) considered volunteer bias as virtually always present in any sample of sex research because of the ethical requirement of informed consent.

Morokoff (1986) found in a sample of university women that there were significant differences between those who volunteered for sex research and those who declined after an initial orientation to the study. Volunteers tended to report greater noncoital sexual experience, greater masturbatory experience, less sexual inhibition, and more experience with unusual sexual activity. The sexual inhibition factor is of greatest importance because measurement of the other three factors is so importantly affected by it. The results of Morokoff's study suggested that volunteer bias in survey research may inflate estimations of the frequency of premarital sex.

Levinson (1986) conducted research on the contraceptive behavior of adolescent females surveyed at a family planning clinic. A small portion of those considered for the research declined, but they were found to constitute a significantly different group in that they were coming for abortions or pregnancy tests as opposed to contraception or gynecological examinations. This illustrates the potential for error in results that are attributed to a systematic difference between participants and nonparticipants.

Perhaps the most common use of nonvolunteer subjects is that of undergraduate university students. Such subjects are drawn typically from introductory human science courses (McBroom, Reed, Burns, Hartgraves, & Trankel, 1985; Sprecher, 1989) which offer an appropriate cross-section of the student population but often not much choice as to whether they will or will not participate in the study. Response accuracy is questionable because subjects who feel coerced into completing a study may alter their responses in more socially acceptable directions.

Data Collection

The methods of data collection employed in sex research are varied, but perhaps the most prominent in premarital studies is the survey. Among the more common survey methods are the self-administered questionnaire and the face-to-face interveiew. Crooks and Baur (1987) noted the main advantage of the questionnaire to be increased anonymity and less pressure to distort responses (i.e., to over-report or under-report) than would likely occur in a face-to-face interview. However, the interview method has the distinct advantage of flexibility in that the interviewer can clarify questions for the respondent or alter their order so as to better fit the particular interviewee. Therefore, the results of an interview are likely to be more comprehensive than those obtained from a questionnaire.

Catania, McDermott, and Pollack (1986) compared self-administered questionnaires to face-to-face interviews in the conduct of sex research. They concluded that the questionnaire method may be more advantageous than the interview because there is less response distortion in respect to the subject's breadth of sexual knowledge and experience. These authors noted as well that the primary difficulty with the questionnaire method is nonresponse bias because subjects feel that it is easier to leave sensitive

questions blank. This was demonstrated in a study of the sexual behavior of Israeli university students in which male responders left blank the larger number of sexually related questions (Notzer, Levran, Masiach, & Soffer, 1984).

Similar to response bias as a threat to internal validity in survey research, cohort factors arise typically as threats to the external validity, or generalizability of the results to other populations. Cohort factors relate to bias that may arise as the result of current cultural or sociological norms that are not found outside a particular group. Such bias is perhaps best controlled for through limiting the extent to which an investigator attempts to generalize results (e.g., college students, women, Blacks), and through replicating a study at later times in order to extend the scope of the original results (e.g., Robinson et al., 1968; Robinson & Jedlicka, 1982).

Cohort bias is illustrated in a study conducted by Nix, Pasteur, and Servance (1989). Sexual attitudes of young Black males were drawn through use of a focus group in which subjects discussed together their views on dating, sex roles and childbearing responsibilities. Because of the group format for data collection it is reasonable to assume that subjects' responses were affected by pressure from peers to respond in socially and culturally acceptable ways. The results may be a relatively accurate picture of socially normative attitudes for this group, though at the same time a distortion of current attitudes held by its individual members.

Religiosity

Lastly, much of the literature includes religiosity as a demographic factor related to attitudes toward and actual practice of premarital sex. Perhaps unique to other demographic factors, for example, age, sex, race, and so forth, there is considerable variance in the measurement of religiosity.

Spilka, Hood, and Gorsuch (1985) determined that because of the highly complex nature of religion, single trait measures (for example, church attendance) in Likert-type self ratings are neither adequate nor appropriate. The authors suggested instead that a multitrait measure of religiosity would in the end be more accurate and more sensitive to the individual. Combining Allport's (1959) intrinsic-extrinsic religious dimensions, as well as Allen and Spilka's (1967) committed-consensual dimensions of faith, Hunt and King (1971) developed a scale of religiosity that measures both intrinsic-committed as well as extrinsic-consensual faith commitments.

According to a description of this scale (Spilka et al., 1985), an intrinsic-committed faith is one that is (a) internalized for the individual, (b) transcends personal needs (that is, it is God-centered), and is (c) open to an intense, interpersonal relationship with God. One the other hand, extrinsic-consensual faith is (a) rule-focused, (b) self-centered, and (c) based on social expectation and tradition. Thus an extrinsic-consensual faith is not pervasive in the individual's life, but is considered secondary to personal desires. The continuum between intrinsic-committed and extrinsic-consensual is perhaps a more accurate measure of religiosity than self-report or church attendance because it considers the degree to which an individual's faith is internalized as his or her own. Most of the studies that have investigated the effects of religiosity on premarital sex have utilized what appear to be extrinsic-consensual variables.

The 1985 Gallup Report implied that 40% of those who considered themselves to be highly religious also approved of premarital intercourse (For the First Time, 1985). According to the report, religiosity was measured through self ratings on only a few questions. Similarly, Earle and Perricone (1986) measured religiosity by means of responses to two Likert-type attitude

questions; one concerning church attendance and one of self-perception as devout, moderately devout or inactive. The studies cited above, though selective, are illustrative of the preponderance of religiosity studies, that is, the majority measure predominantly external indicators of religiosity. The variables employed in these studies basically provide information regarding the extrinsic-consensual end of the faith commitment continuum. However, in order to determine the actual effects of increased religiosity on sexual behavior there is a need for studies that focus specifically on the intrinsic-committed end of the faith commitment continuum.

Summary

Research on premarital sex in the past decade has continued to improve methodologically. Confronted with many of the same sampling and measurement issues that face sex research in general, the body of research considered has provided examples of carefully designed studies, as well as those in which conclusions are suspect because of a lack of methodological rigor. Methodological issues will be referred to in evaluating the results of studies in the attempt to tease out the various determinants of premarital sexual behavior.

Determinants of Engaging in Premarital Sex

The research of the 1980s has shown a continuation of the trends noted in the 1970s, but has surfaced as well some determinants of premarital sexual behavior and attitudes unique to its own period. In the section which follows, there is discussion of those primary factors influencing premarital sexual attitudes and behaviors as derived from studies conducted in the 1980s, including parental influence, peer influence, dysfunctional families, affective components, personality and self-perception, religiosity,

and educational/cultural factors, gender differences and effects on marriage and family planning.

Parental Influences

Parents and family play an important role in sexual attitudes and behavior as they are developing during adolescence. Theoretically, parental attitudes serve a key function in the separation/ individuation process of middle and late adolescence. The young person relies on parents to offer encouragement toward independence, as well as a safe place to return for emotional refueling (Blos, 1979). Consequently, the home is the environment out of which the adolescent develops a sense of his or her own sexuality.

Parental attitudes are seen to play a varied role in shaping children's attitudes toward premarital sex. Shah and Zelnik (1981), in a study of more than 2,000 adolescent females drawn from a national probability sample, determined that subjects who considered their views on premarital sex highly influenced by their parents (that is, 15-20%) were most restrictive. Those who cited friends as most influential (45-53%) tended to be highly active sexually, as well as inconsistent in their use of contraception. Those who considered their parents as most influential and who were also sexually active tended to be consistent in their use of contraception whether always used or never used. It is interesting to note that a third of the respondents were undecided as to whether to designate parents or friends as their primary influence in respect to making decisions about engaging in premarital sex. This perhaps illustrates again the ambivalence of young people in the 1980s in respect to sexual behaviors.

In a similar study, Shelley (1981) showed that liberal parental attitudes toward premarital sex were highly correlated with liberal attitudes in their

children. In Shelley's study, liberalism was defined by a negative response to such statements as, (a) "Homosexuality and prostitution are criminal matters," (b) "Women do not enjoy sex as much as men," and (c) "Easy access to birth control increases promiscuity." Although the study yielded some interesting results, the representativeness of the results should be viewed with some caution since the investigator relied on a convenience sample drawn from church youth groups.

Overall, parents have been found to have a strong impact on the sexual attitudes and behavior of their children both in encouraging as well as discouraging sexual activity (Herold, 1981; Thornton & Camburn, 1987). Proctor (1986) noted that children are often given implicit permission for irresponsible sexual activity through observing the activities of their parents and of older siblings. Such intergenerational transmission of values provides unspoken permission or even expectation for premarital intercourse, pregnancy and abortion. Thus more than they may realize, parents' attitudes and behavior may strongly influence their adolescent children's behavior, though their influence is often more indirect than direct.

Recent research has shown that peers, physicians and educators are considered to be more common sources of sex education than are parents (Sprecher, 1989). Milan and Kilmann (1987) reviewed the literature concerning interpersonal factors in premarital decisions about contraception, and research has demonstrated that effective use of contraception is most consistent when adolescents have been given explicit information about it. In addition, it has been shown in a study by Moore, Peterson, and Furstenberg (1986) that parents who hold traditional values and who talk openly with their adolescent daughters have a strong impact

on daughters' decisions about engaging in premarital sex. Although Moore and associates did not find the same results for boys, they hypothesized that boys begin experimenting with sex earlier than girls, indeed, the median age of the subjects in their sample (boys, 15-16 years old) was beyond the age at which the boys would likely be impacted by parental intervention.

In their survey of 12 to 14 year old junior high school students, Smith, Nenney, & McGill (1986) found that 36% of the boys and 12% of the girls admitted to having had sexual intercourse at least once. Further, 53% of the total sample cited parents as their main source of sex education. These results contradict previous findings regarding adolescents' primary sources of sex education (Milan & Kilmann, 1987). However, the results obtained in the study by Smith et al. (1986) may be questioned because data were collected by means of face-to-face interviews conducted at the school. It is conjectured that this approach may have put pressure on the junior high students to respond with what they felt was the "right" or expected answer, as opposed to one based on their actual experience. All in all, the results from the Smith et al. study may therefore be less reliable than those reported by Milan and Kilmann (1987) and by Sprecher (1989).

It appears that parents' views about sexual matters become more consciously valued as their children enter the young adult years. McBroom, Reed, Burns, Hargraves, and Trankel (1985) found that youth/parent agreement is a significant factor in sexual decision-making. Although having parental support in sexual decisions was viewed as having great importance, parental views did not outweigh students' opinions. In a similar study of 334 university students, Knox and Wilson (1981) found that while subjects desired limited parental involvement in their dating lives,

they nevertheless experienced their parents as either interfering in or completing ignoring their dating relationships.

Richardson and Cranston (1981) concluded that parents lack appropriate education about sexuality let alone how to talk to their children about it. They called for less reliance for sex education on the schools and more on the home. In the absence of direct discussion about sexuality at home, many young people have to find other ways (e.g., peers, the media) to gather information about sexuality in attempting to develop their sexual identities. It is unfortunate that the other ways of gathering information are often poor sources of accurate information.

In their study of 17 to 21 year old students, LeSala (1981) found that fear of parental dectection had an impact on the sexual behavior of 22% of female and 4% of male subjects. Similarly, parent imposed guilt and embarrassment have been found to be strong determinants of premarital sexual behavior and contraceptive use in young women (DeAmicis, Klorman, Hess, and McAnarney, 1981; Herold, 1981). Thus, much of what is communicated about premarital sex is through emotionally charged messages rather than through direct and open discussion. Fear, guilt or embarrassment cause young women to avoid discussion of their sexuality with their parents, and therefore often leads them to make decisions about their sexual behavior and contraception usage that are unplanned and ill-informed.

Findings in a study by Baker, Thalberg, and Morrison (1988) suggested that open discussion with parents regarding sexuality and contraception decreased sexual guilt significantly in persons 14 to 17 years of age. Furthermore, it was found in the same study that for those adolescents who chose to be sexually active parental discussion not only greatly increased the

frequency of contraceptive use but also the effectiveness of contraceptive method. Such studies serve to confirm that healthy family relationships highly influence the premarital sexual attitudes and behavior of young people.

Dysfunctional Families

There have been a few studies that have considered the effects of family dysfunction on premarital sexuality in young adults. Kinnaird and Gerard (1986) studied premarital sexual behavior in young women from intact, divorced and reconstituted family systems. The results showed that young women from divorced families (that is, families in which parents divorced during subjects' preteen years) and reconstituted families were sexually active at a significantly younger age than those from intact families. Of the young women who were sexually active, 57.1% of those from divorced families and 33% from reconstituted families had first intercourse at the age of 16 or younger. In contrast, 18.8% of sexually active women from intact families had first intercourse by age 16. Similarly, Newcomb (1986) found in his study of college age subjects that cohabitors had a high level of dysfunction in their families of origin, and had become sexually active at a significantly younger age than non-cohabitors. Surprisingly, Kinnaird and Gerard (1986) also found that subjects from conflicted families, whether intact or divorced, reported an increased age of first dating. This contradicts previously held beliefs that escaping family conflict tends to drive children to begin dating at an earlier age. The investigators theorized that young adolescents in conflicted families often take the role of providing emotional support for one or both of the parents. Thus, they may feel less permission to separate from the family, a normal part of developing dating relationships. The Kinnaird and Gerard study points to the strong impact

that family functioning has on sexual decision-making and on what a young person may consider to be appropriate sexual behavior.

As might be expected, the degree of family dysfunction will likely determine the extent to which a young person will be affected by it. In a study of the correlates of courtship violence, Lane and Gwartney-Gibbs (1985) found that in their questioning of a random sample of university students, 30% of male and 40% of female subjects had inflicted or received some sort of courtship violence. Of this group, a significant number had experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in their families of origin. Though the authors defined rather broadly the meaning of violence (including in it verbal abuse), their study well illustrates the effects of extreme family dysfunction on the sexual relationships of the children when they reach adolescence and young adulthood.

In summary, the research has shown that parents are higly influential in the development of the sexual attitudes and behavior of their adolescent and young adult children. Although adolescence is a period in which identity separate from parents is being developed, the literature has nevertheless suggested that nonverbal as well as verbal communication of parental values has great impact on a young person's decision-making in respect to premarital sex. In young women particularly, such emotional factors as fear of parental detection, guilt, and embarrassment inhibit responsible exploration of premarital sex. Furthermore, studies have shown a significant correlation between family conflict and coital experience. Unfortunately, the research has also shown that much of the direct communication of information about sexual matters has been left to the schools with very little discussion of them at home.

Peer Influence

Although parents appear to highly impact the premarital sexual attitudes of their adolescent and young adult children, actual sexual behavior is most susceptible to peer influence (Shah & Zelnik, 1981; Herold, 1981). For example, in helping parents detect risk factors for teen pregnancy in 12 to 14 year old girls, Proctor (1986) cited as key indicators of sexual activity (a) unusually high amounts of time spent alone with peers, (b) older boy friends, and (c) a low number of girl friends. Parents may have strong influence on contraceptive use (Baker et al., 1988), but sexual activity is typically peer determined (Yamaguchi & Kandel, 1987).

Sexual activity among adolescents is perhaps not as strongly affected by direct peer statements as it is by their perceptions of peer expectations and activity. In a focus group study of 13 to 20 year-old Black males, Nix et al. (1988) found that peer expectations as well as perception of peer activity were most commonly reported as factors affecting subjects' sexual activity. As mentioned previously in this review, there are some important methodological issues in this study by Nix and his associates concerning its utilization of group data. However, other research has supported their results in findings that have suggested that premarital sexual behavior is strongly affected (a) by an individual's perception of her or his close friends' behavior (Brown, 1985), as well as (b) by perception of close friends use of contraception (Sack, Billingham, & Howard, 1985).

Although peer influence is a strong determinant of the nature of young people's premarital sexual behavior, the research suggests that it is often based on biased perception of peer activity. Hocking, Walker, and Fink (1982) demonstrated the strong effect of perception on judgment in a study

of 98 university student subjects (51 males, 47 females) in which different groups were told a story of a woman who had had sexual intercourse with a man not known to her previously. Each subject was asked to judge the woman as either moral or immoral. The independent variable was the attractiveness of the woman. The investigators found that when the woman was perceived to be attractive, she was considered significantly less moral for the same act than when she was perceived to be unattractive. The study indicated that physical characteristics are important factors in considering the sexual activity of a peer. Likewise, the research has suggested that personal comparisons also play a role in perceptions of peers' sexual activity. Roche (1986) found that late adolescents and young adults tend to consider the sexual behavior of others much more permissive than their own. When subjects were considering their own personal beliefs, personal behavior and perception of others' behavior, Roche found that they tended themselves to become more sexually permissive. It would appear on the whole that young adults tend to view themselves as much more conservative in terms of sexual behavior than their peers.

The importance of peer influence was studied by Sack et al. (1984) in relation to the effect of religiosity and sex guilt on premarital sexual attitudes and behavior. Through use of questionnaire data from a randomly selected sample of university students, it was shown that although the factors of religiosity and sex guilt were influential, they were so only in relation to perception of peer attitudes toward them. That is, peer opinion not only affected views on premarital sex, but also the relative importance of factors such as religiosity and sex guilt. One methodological issue that may be criticized in the Sack et al. (1984) study is that although the investigators did account for gender differences, they did not take into consideration that

factors such as religiosity may have influenced their subjects' choice of peer groups.

The same issue is found in a similar study by Herold and Goodwin (1981a) in which it was shown that factors related to virginity status in high school and college age women were peer experience, dating commitment and religiosity--in descending order of importance. Again, although they seem to distinguish key factors determining sexual behavior in their subjects, the Herold and Goodwin study did not take into account the effect that other factors, for example, parental opinion or religiosity, may have on peer selection or dating commitment.

Despite some methodological problems, the studies cited above point to the profound impact that peer relationships have on the premarital sexual attitudes and behavior of adolescents and young adults. Similar to parental influence, many of the effects of an individual's peer group on premarital sexuality are communicated nonverbally. Indeed, the most dramatic effects of the peer group were found to be perception of peer activity, which was biased toward greater permissiveness. At this period in their lives, false perceptions of peers may account for the feelings of inadequacy that adolescents often experience regarding their sexuality.

Personality and Self-Perception

Many studies on the influence of peer relationships on premarital sexual behavior have stressed that personal variables play a key role in the subject's perception of peer sexual activity. For example, Jurich (1979) found an interrelationship between the variables of environment, peers and cognitive development which vary according to the individual. Thus, Jurich noted that the impact of outside variables often depends on the individual's idiosyncratic psychological development. Particularly in later

adolescence and young adulthood, persons are more apt to cite individualistic variables as part of their sexual decision-making (Herold & Goodwin, 1981c).

As mentioned earlier, adolescence is the time when a child is in the process of developing a unique sense of identity, one that is separate from that of his or her parents. Although parents play a key role in development of sexual attitudes, there is research suggesting their role does not necessarily outweigh the young person's own opinions (McBroom et al., 1985). Newcomb (1986) showed that university students who cohabited with sexual partners tended to be more self-confident and yet more distant from their parents. Newcomb's study concluded that early sexual activity produces a dramatic separation that prevents parents from being integrated into the young person's developing sexuality. However, Newcomb noted as well that family dysfunction may precede the young person's separation from his or her family.

Levinson (1986) studied contraceptive use among teenage girls and related it to a self-efficacy scale developed expressly for the study. Self-efficacy, as described by Bandura (1977), involves an individual's expectation regarding ability to achieve a specific behavior. This expectation then determines the initiation and persistence which is used in the actual accomplishment of the behavior. It was found that girls with high levels of self-efficacy, and who were also sexually active, would more likely engage in effective and frequent contraception. Likewise, those with a low sense of self-efficacy tended to use ineffective or no means of contraception, such as douching or relying on "luck."

In a similar study it was found that adolescents who were sexually active tended to be risk-takers with contraception. McCormick, Izzo, and

Folcick (1985) reported that of subjects who used contraception, 57% used condoms and 21% used completely ineffective methods such as withdrawal, luck, or douching. These studies would seem to suggest the importance of developing self-confidence in adolescents, as well as a more conscious awareness of their views on premarital sexuality and the issues involved.

The correlates of personality variables with premarital sexuality have also been studied directly through use of various personality inventories. For example, Jurich (1984) compared students from religious and sectarian schools on dimensions of cognitive/moral development and sexual permissiveness. As might be expected, he found that students at religious schools tended to be more conventional in cognitive/moral development and less sexually permissive than students at nonsectarian universities.

Lee and Mancini (1981), utilizing a sample of university students, studied gender differences in premarital sexuality in relation to internal-external locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Rotter's scale measures whether an individual looks to internal, personal factors or to external, circumstancial factors for reinforcement of his or her behavior. Lee and Mancini found that of subjects who were sexually active, males with an internal locus of control tended to have more frequent sexual intercourse, while external males tended to have greater numbers of sex partners. Another significant finding of the Lee and Mancini study was that internal female subjects tended to use more effective means of contraception than did external women. The investigators concluded that further understanding of external and internal locus of control as it relates to sexual activity may lead not only to a better understanding of the type of relationships individuals may choose but also of the sexual behavior that can be expected within their relationships.

Because of the strong impact that personal beliefs and opinions have on sexual decision making, Ewald and Roberts (1985) have theorized that intervention in respect to premarital sexuality is more easily achieved at the level of beliefs and attitudes than at the behavioral level. The investigators applied the Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) BAIB model to premarital sexual counseling in adolescents, a model that considers four levels of personal change: (a) beliefs, (b) attitudes, (c) intention, and (d) behavior. Because of the potential for change that comes at the deeper beliefs/attitudes levels, Ewald and Roberts concluded that counseling young people would be most effective were it to focus on these deeper constructs, as opposed to focusing merely at the level of seeking to change immediate behavior.

To summarize, the research shows that self-perception and personality factors particularly impact the overall sense of responsibility with which an adolescent or young adult approaches premarital sexual relationships. It can be shown from the research that heightened self-confidence greatly increases the consistency and effectiveness of the contraception employed by sexually active young people. Further, the research would seem to suggest the importance of giving increased attention to helping young people think through their attitudes and beliefs about their sexuality, as opposed to attempting merely to control their sexual behavior. It is with this in mind that the focus of this review shifts to the effects of religiosity on premarital sexualty in adolescents and young adults.

Religiosity

As mentioned above, the methods reported in the literature for the measurement of religiosity have varied greatly. At least in part, this accounts for the wide range of results concerning the effects of religiosity on premarital sexual activity. However, the research seems to chronicle a trend

toward the decreased impact of religiosity on sexual behavior. For example, Barrett (1980) reported religiosity to have been a more reliable predictor of sexual behavior in 1968 than it was in 1978. Similarly, religiosity has been hypothesized as an important determinant of premarital sex, but only in relation to other more potent variables such as peer group and dating commitment (Herold & Goodwin, 1981c; Sack et al., 1984).

Results from other studies have shown an increase in young peoples' view of premarital intercourse as sinful or immoral, while at the same time revealing an increase in premarital sexual behavior (Robinson & Jedlicka, 1982). This section focuses on this split in the results reported in the literature in respect to the relative effect of religiosity on the premarital sexual activity of adolescents and young adults.

In an extensive study of Australian adults, Hong (1985) found religion and age to be the most powerful predictors of premarital sexual attitudes. He also found that gender and education were considered much less determinative than had been hypothesized. Similar findings were found in a sample of university undergraduates in Nebraska (Medora & Woodward, 1982). Using frequency of church attendance as a measure of religiosity (attendance once in two weeks was the minimal criterion for considering a subject as religious), Medora and Woodward showed that premarital sexual attitudes of religious subjects were significantly more conservative ($p < .001$) than those of nonreligious subjects. Furthermore, Newcomb (1986) found that among university students church attendance was negatively correlated with sexual cohabitation.

It would seem from such studies that traditional Judeo-Christian views of premarital sexual intercourse have a strong effect on those who practice these faiths, as opposed to those who merely state that they are religious. In a

study of Jewish university students in Israel, it was found that orthodoxy had a strong impact on attitudes toward premarital sex (Notzer, Levran, Mashiach, & Soffer, 1984). However, precise conclusions were difficult to arrive at from this study because many of the orthodox students had left the sexuality questions blank. The investigators theorized that the more religious the student the less sex was considered contributory to a premarital relationship. The acceptance of abortion also declined. Such differences between religious and nonreligious students have also been demonstrated in the United States (Jurich, 1984). In a study by Maret and Maret (1982), fundamentalist students from a small Bible college were shown to be significantly less accepting of both premarital and extramarital sex than were non-Fundamentalist students from two state universities. The Maret and Maret study had two methodological flaws that may have accounted for error in the results. First, subjects were approached randomly by a male experimenter and asked to fill out a questionnaire. This method of data collection may have discouraged accurate disclosure of sexual information, particularly at a small Bible college where there is less anonymity. Second, the questionnaire included only two 7-point Likert-type questions and a place to circle either "Fundamentalist" or "nonFundamentalist." Although simplicity in a questionnaire is desirable, the measure employed may have been too simple for accurate discrimination between subjects.

Although most of the studies reviewed here have shown religiosity to have some kind of impact on premarital sex in adolescents and young adults, a few have noted a decline in its effect (Barrett, 1980), or have found no effect at all (McCormick et al., 1985). In a study of views on sex education in the schools, it was found that neither religious nor political orientation had any bearing on whether or not an individual was for or against sex

education programs (Mahoney, 1979). McCormick et al. (1985) found that religiosity had no effect whatever on premarital sex nor on the use of contraceptives in adolescents. The major difficulty with the McCormick et al. study is the means by which religiosity was assessed. In this instance, religiosity was measured by responses to rather vague questions about God, for example, "Do you believe that the world will come to an end according to the will of God?" It would seem that students may have answered "yes" to such questions based on societal norms, as opposed to personal faith.

Perhaps the most common conclusion seen in the literature of the 1980s as to the effects of religiosity on premarital sex is that of ambivalence between belief and practice. Johnson (1986) found that young adults tended to have a more conservative standard for the sexual behavior of close family members than for strangers or even for themselves. Similarly, Singh (1980), using data from five national surveys, found that there was an increasing approval of premarital sex between 1972 and 1978, but that religiosity continued to be a strong factor affecting attitudes about premarital sex. As already mentioned, the results of a recent Gallup Poll showed that by self-report 40% of those who considered themselves highly religious also felt that premarital sex was unacceptable behavior (For the 1st Time, 1985).

Some have theorized that the current trend is toward a sexuality removed from the realm of personal beliefs and attitudes, thus allowing for greater freedom in behavior (Ewald & Roberts, 1985). Roche (1986) found that adolescents and young adults showed an increasing sexual permissiveness from personal beliefs to personal behavior to perceptions of others' behavior. Similarly, it has been recognized that change in the sexual behavior of adolescents is much more effective at the level of beliefs and attitudes (Ewald & Roberts, 1985). Taken as a whole, therefore, the research

suggests that much of what has been designed to effect change in the premarital sexuality of adolescents and young adults has focused on behavior rather than on the deeper level of personal beliefs.

Thus, ambivalence in terms of beliefs and atttitudes versus behavior may be due partly to a sociological trend toward a more behavior-oriented sexuality that is split off from considerations of personal beliefs or of religiosity. This may also be reflective of a tendency of young people to endorse religious views as needing to be congruent with personal behavior while at the same time ignoring established religious guidelines concerning sexuality.

Cognitive dissonance theory has been considered a way of accounting for views of premarital sex that are incongruent with personal behavior (Jenks, 1985). In his formulation of cognitive dissonance theory, Festinger (1957) theorized that human beings are motivated to decrease whatever inconsistency there may be between their various attitudes or between their attitudes and their behavior.

Jenks (1985) found that persons with very liberal patterns of sexual behavior (swingers) were also found to be liberal in their views of premarital sex and other sexually related issues (e.g., pornography, abortion) as compared with those holding more traditional views on sexual matters (nonswingers). However, this difference was not reflected in the two groups' distinctive views on other non-sexually related issues such as gun control or capital punishment.

Taken together, the block of studies cited above appears to lend support to the view that premarital sexual attitudess and behavior are strongly interdependent but also may vary greatly over time and with experience. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that in the absence of a specific belief

system many young people form their sexual attitudes secondarily to becoming sexually active.

Affective Components

Cutting across a number of other determinants, affect plays an important role in premarital sexual decision-making. Issues such as guilt or embarrassment, as well as personal affection, strongly impact the sexual behavior of adolescents and young adults. Researchers have found that a strong affective bond continues to be highly influential in a couple's decision to engage in sexual intercourse (Christopher & Cate, 1984; Roche, 1986). A survey of selected studies concerning the relationship of affective variables to premarital sexual attitudes and behavior follows.

In discussions of premarital sex, guilt and religiosity have often been considered as very closely related to each other. Although researchers have generally assumed they are related and have tended to lump them together, empirical support is lacking for the assumption. Sack et al. (1984) studied the relative effects of peer group, religiosity and sexual guilt on the determination of premarital sexual behavior in college students. The investigators found peer influence to be primary with religiosity and sexual guilt to be secondary but not necessarily coincidental with each other.

In a study of pro-choice and anti-abortion activists, Allgeier, Allgeier, and Rywick (1981) found that although anti-abortion activists seemed to possess greater sexual guilt than those holding pro-choice views, the two groups were identical in the extent of their sexual knowledge. These researchers concluded that affective variables, as opposed to careful consideration of the factual knowledge of sex, have greater influence on views about abortion. One variable apparently overlooked in the study, however, was that of a personal value system as an intervening variable

between knowledge and affect. Perhaps what these researchers referred to as sexual guilt might be better described as a value system which prohibits certain sexual activity.

Guilt and embarrassment have been found to adversely affect contraceptive use. In a study of sexually active high school and university age women, Herold (1981) found that subjects with high sexual embarrassment were less likely to use contraceptives, or if they used them tended to trust ineffective methods. This research showed that parental attitudes regarding premarital sex and sexual guilt were the best predictors of sexual embarrassment when subjects sought information about contraceptives. In a similar study, Herold and Goodwin (1981b) showed that high sexual guilt correlated significantly with low sex knowledge in women 13 to 20 years old. Finally, Baker et al. (1988) found that parent-imposed sexual guilt had little effect on sexual activity, but significantly decreased the appropriate use of contraceptives in adolescents 14 to 17 years old.

Results of the three studies cited suggest that sexual guilt has little effect on premarital sexual activity, but rather, discourages thinking through the issues in being sexually active and thereby acting responsibly in respect to sexual behavior. The results also point to the importance of talking to adolescents about sex, particularly about sexual attitudes and beliefs. Each of the three studies also concluded by noting the importance of open channels of communication between parents and young people in regard to sexuality and sexual issues.

Fear has also been found to have very little effect on the sexual activity of adolescents and young adults. In a study of 514 single high school and college women, Herold and Goodwin (1981c) found that fear of pregnancy was of minimal consideration in determining sexual activity. The

investigators found that overall the subjects in this study stipulated lack of opportunity or lack of personal readiness for a sexual relationship as the main reasons for not being sexually active. Similarly, in the results of a study of restraints to premarital coitus in university students, Jedlicka and Robinson (1987) reported that fear of venereal disease had little impact on sexual activity. Overall, women in the study tended to cite moral/religious factors as primary restraints to sexual activity, while men tended to focus on such external restraints as limits set by girlfriends.

Although fear of AIDS was reported among university students in the 1980s (Spees, 1987), there is no research to support fear of AIDS as playing a significant role in inhibiting the premarital sexual activity of adolescents or young adults. It has been suggested that denial, which is common within this developmental period, allows adolescents and young adults to distance themselves emotionally from the real consequences of sexual activity (Jedlicka & Robinson, 1987). Although the young people may be aware of such realities as sexually transmitted diseases (STD) or pregnancy, the awareness does not appear to alter their sexual behavior to any significant degree.

In summary, in terms of the role that emotional factors play in leading adolescents and young adults to engage in premarital sexual activity, the research suggests guilt, embarrassment and fear have little impact on sexual activity in this population. The greatest positive impact they may have is in encouraging avoidance of the dangerous realities of sexual activity. On the other hand, their most negative impact may be the denial which discourages them from thinking through and planning for the issues surrounding premarital sex. The studies cited suggest that educating young people about premarital sex would be most effective were the focus of

parents on open exploration of personal beliefs as opposed to more common tactics of reinforcing fear or guilt.

Educational and Cultural Factors

Many of the conclusions of the research on premarital sexual attitudes and behavior among adolescents and young adults have focused in one form or another on sex education. The education that young people receive concerning premarital sex comes not only from the school but also from the home, from peers, and generally from the cultural and societal norms currently in place. The focus of this section is on (a) the effects of school based sex education programs on young people's premarital sexual attitudes and behavior, and (b) on the literature concerning the relation of cultural factors to decisions about premarital sexuality.

Dignan, Denson, Anspaugh, and C'mich (1985) studied differences in sexual behavior of college students enrolled in a human sexuality course compared to those enrolled in a first-aid course. Using an experimental group of 127 students and a control group of 136 students, the investigators measured differences from before and after the semester. Dignan and associates found that students enrolled in the human sexuality course were more sexually active than the first-aid course control group both at onset and at the conclusion of the study, though evidencing no measurable change in overall sexual activity as a result of the course. The possibility exists of volunteer bias in that there was a significant difference in the prior sexual activity of those students choosing to take the human sexuality course and those who did not. The main effects of the human sexuality course subjects were seen in an increase in the variety of their sexual experiences (e.g., oral-genital sex). Thus, it appears that students who chose to take sex education were already sexually active but became open to a

wider variety of sexual experiences; that is, sex education was not responsible for bringing about the increase in sexual activity but only tne variety in its expression.

The research has shown that much of the controversy surrounding the education of young people about sex revolves around who is responsible for the task. In a poll of 12 to 14 year old adolescents, Smith et al. (1986) found that 53% cited parents as their main source of information about sex. In this study, mentioned earlier, data were collected using face-to-face interviews with the students at school, which may have affected the validity of responses. In contrast, Milan and Kilmann (1987) reviewed the literature from the 1970s and found that peers, physicians and educators were the primary sources of birth control information for adolescents. These investigators pointed to poor communication at home as adversely affecting the information young people received concerning attitudes toward premarital sex.

Richardson and Cranston (1981) concluded that there is currently a trend toward the educational system being given a disproportionate amount of responsibility for teaching young people about sexuality. Using the 1977 General Social Survey (National Opinion Research Center, 1977) which included data from 1,530 persons over 18 years of age, the investigators showed that school-based sex education programs were intruding upon the role of parents in teaching values regarding premarital sex. They observed that a trend in urban school systems is the development of sex education curricula that do not include parent input, thus contributing to the sort of family-school conflict on this issue that exists at present.

Studies are consistent in finding over-involvement of the education system and under-involvement of the family in teaching young people

about sex. Although there are differing views as to who may be considered at fault, the research on sex education points to a need for reevaluating the respective responsibilities of both the family and the school in educating young peope about sexuality.

A number of studies have surveyed the impact that economic and cultural differences may have on premarital sexual decision-making. Studies have shown consistently that socio-economic status (SES) is unrelated to premarital sexual standards or behavior (Brown, 1985; Singh, 1980). In a study of 130 undergraduate students at a midwestern university, Medora and Woodward (1982) found significant differences between males and females as well as between religious and nonreligious individuals in opinions concerning premarital sexual behavior. However, no significant differences were found between subjects from three levels of SES in respect to premarital sexual opinions. Because Medora and Woodward did not clarify the parameters of SES in their study, it is possible that in the university setting there was not a clear representation of each SES group.

As with socio-economic status, the literature has also not supported race as a determinant of premarital sexual behavior (Brown, 1985). Much of the research on racial factors has been prompted by assumptions made in past sociological research that minority groups are already high-permissive populations (Chilman, 1980). Fisher (1980) studied the correlates of sexual behavior in Black women and found Blacks to be similar to White controls in both attitudes and behavior in respect to premarital sex.

Barry and Schlegel (1986) have conducted extensive sociological research on cultural complexity and sexual freedom in adolescents. They found that in cultures with high levels of social stratification and economic complexity there were generally low levels of sexual freedom. In their

study, low sexual freedom was defined as restrictions on heterosexual expression with no allowance made for homosexuality. In cultures with high levels of sexual freedom, Barry and Schlegel found four recurrent variables: (a) an adolescent initiation ceremony for both boys and girls, (b) marriage outside the local community, (c) matrilineal descent and (d) monogamous marriage. Although the investigators were not able to place the United States into any one of the specific categories identified by the study, they did conclude that understanding these cultural variables may assist as well in understanding the rise of premarital sexual freedom in American culture.

Gender Differences

Perhaps most closely related to cultural factors, gender differences in respect to premarital sexual attitudes and behavior have been a primary focus in the literature of the 1980s. Research has tended to focus on differences in sexual permissiveness between men and women (Medora & Woodward, 1982; Sprecher, 1989) and on gender differences concerning sexual expectations (Knox & Wilson, 1981). Furthermore, investigators who have focused on trend analysis have seen shifts in gender differences in relation to premarital sexual attitudes and behavior (MacCorquodale, 1984). The closing gap of differences between the sexes is one important trend reported in the literature.

This closing gap of gender differences has been witnessed in an increase of egalitarian attitudes toward the use of contraception (MacCorquodale, 1984), and in an overall decrease of the discriminative value of gender in determining premarital sexual standards (Hong, 1985). In a study of 466 students from a large mid-Atlantic university, Keller, Elliott, and Gunberg (1982) found that single male and female students were moving toward an

equal standard with regard to premarital sexual behavior. Although Keller and associates found females to be more monogamous than males, their findings suggested that from 1975 there has been a dramatic increase in college age women who engage in premarital sexual activity.

The literature also points to differences between men and women in their attitudes toward premarital sex, though not in their behavior. Thus, the "double standard" moral code that imposes a different and more restrictive standard for women than for men has greatly diminished in the 1980s (Jacoby & Williams, 1985). Earle and Perricone (1986) reported that even though women were found to adhere to much more conservative attitudes than their male counterparts regarding the acceptability of premarital sex, differences have not been found between them as to sexual behavior. Earle and Perricone suggested as well that societal judgments remain rather strict for women, thus requiring them to justify their sexual behavior with more traditional attitudes toward sexuality. Hence, it is concluded that a change in attitude follows rather than precedes coital experience.

The research concerning gender discrimination in premarital sexual behavior supports the conclusion that the outright ambivalence of the 1980s has been replaced with what Reiss (1967) has termed "permissiveness with affection." This was defined as acceptance of premarital coitus, but only in the context of a committed relationship. In a study of undergraduate college students' perceptions of sexual behavior, Spreadbury (1982) found that women were generally viewed more negatively than men for the same behavior. There is still a tendency to view frequent sexual contact with more than one partner as a sign of virility in men, while women are labeled as "loose" or "easy" for the same behavior. Thus, the double standard

between men and women exists in attitude, but not in respect to premarital sexual behavior where there is an identified convergence of gender agreement.

Further research concerning gender differences has revealed that in choosing a dating or marriage partner, women with little or no sexual experience were viewed by men as most desirable, while women considered men with moderate experience to be most desirable (Istvan & Griffitt, 1980). These results suggest that (a) a higher level of sexual experience is not considered desirable by either men or women in seeking an opposite sex relationship, but (b) the norm for men to be more sexually experienced than their wives or girlfriends is still present.

Along with the relative sexual experience of the partner, perceptions of peer behavior and attitudes have been shown to affect men and women differently. Sack et al. (1984) studied factors related to the decision of college students to engage in premarital sexual intercourse. The investigators found that men were highly influenced by their perceptions of their male peers' sexual behavior, but were not significantly impacted by peers' stated attitudes toward premarital coitus. Further, in the same study it was shown that women are affected similarly by their female peers' behavior and atittudes. This may reflect a norm in American society for women to be more thoughtful regarding the decision to be sexually active, while men are encouraged to focus on sexual activity as an end in itself.

Such a conclusion finds support in the literature. McCabe (1987) showed that women tended to be more focused on commitment to the relationship in making the decision to have sexual intercourse, while the decision for men appeared to be based primarily on physical arousal. However, in a study of college students' sexual decision-making,

Christopher and Cate (1984) found that men were less likely than previous research had indicated to cite physical attractiveness as an important aspect in the decision to have sexual intercourse in a relationship. In this study, sexual decision-making for men and women was measured on four factors: (a) positive affect/communication, (b) obligation/pressure, (c) arousal/receptivity, and (d) circumstantial. Christopher and Cate showed that women tended to focus on positive affect and communication as the primary factor used in deciding to engage in coitus, while men cited obligation or pressure from their partner, friends, or self as the primary factor.

Following McCabe (1987), it is important to underscore that for both men and women, seriousness of the relationship and desired interpersonal affection were considered to be important factors in sexual decision-making. Thus, the trend appears to be toward permissiveness with affection as the primary influence in young adults' sexual decisions, while concommitantly there is a narrowing of the gap between young adult men and women in terms of factors which influence their sexual relationships.

In summary, the literature reviewed in this section has focused on gender differences in premarital sexual attitudes and behavior. What has become clear is that a double standard for sexual behavior, that is a standard applying to the one gender but not to the other, no longer exists. There is evidence, however, that women have come to place greater emphasis than men on having a belief system to support their sexual lifestyles. Furthermore, men and women seem to have assigned varying degrees of importance to the perceptions of others when it comes to making decisions about their own sexual activity. Women were found to rely much more on both the attitudes and behavior of their peers in making decisions about

engaging in sexual activity. Men, on the other hand, are primarily influenced by the perceptions they have of their peers' sexual behavior alone in making decisions about their personal sexual conduct. If there is a trend to be seen in the literature currently, it is support for "permissiveness with affection," implying an increase in overt sexual behavior among young people but with increasing emphasis on a committed relationship. Other differences between men and women have been identified in the literature as well. For example, women more than men are influenced toward sexual activity by commitment in the relationship, while men are more influenced by a sense of obligation or interpersonal pressure when making sexual decisions.

Effects on Marriage and Family Planning

This concluding section emphasizes the effects of the determinants of premarital sexual attitudes and behavior of adolescents and young adults on marriage and family planning. Hofferth et al. (1987) found that because of the lack of effective contraceptive use, the trend toward adolescents becoming sexually active at a younger age increases the risk of teenage pregnancy. Similarly, Yamaguchi and Kandel (1987) found that the four factors most directly related to teenage pregnancy were (a) use of illicit drugs, (b) being of Black ethnicity, (c) dropping out of high school, and (d) high peer sexual activity. The research suggests therefore that there is a strong relationship between increased sexual activity in adolescents and the social problems facing American society and ultimately the family.

James (1981) suggested that with the current trend toward premarital sexual activity, the honeymoon effect has already occurred at the time of marriage, and thus there is not the dramatic decline during the first year. As mentioned above, the literature has suggested that college students

consider moderate sexual experience desirable in a marriage partner (Jacoby & Williams, 1985). However, persons with a high degree of sexual experience were considered less desirable by both men and women (Istvan & Griffitt, 1980). This implies that there may be a trend toward increased sexual activity, but also away from viewing virginity as the ideal in a mate.

In a study of 321 single undergraduates and their attitudes toward sexual and nonsexual extramarital involvement, Weis and Slosnerick (1981) found that a significant portion of their sample considered extramarital sexual activity inappropriate. However, they also considered nonsexual relationships with the opposite sex appropriate for married persons. Weis and Slosnerick found that males who tended to dissociate sex, love and marriage were more likely to view extramarital sexual relationships as proper. The same subjects were also found to be highly permissive with respect to premarital coitus. The investigators concluded that each individual is reared with certain internal scripts inclining them toward premarital and extramarital sexual involvements, and offered that future research would need to focus on understanding factors that affect such internal scripting.

Two subsequent studies have provided insight into the question of factors that affect attitudes toward premarital and marital sexuality. Kinnaird and Gerrard (1986) found that persons from intact families tended to have greater optimism about marriage and were more likely to delay premarital coitus than persons from either divorced or reconstructed families. Further, they found that young people from divorced families had greater expectation for divorce in their own marriages. However, no differences were found between groups concerning the desirability of marriage.

These findings were supported by Newcomb (1986) in a study of college students who were cohabiting with their sexual partners. Cohabiting students were shown to have more likely come from a conflicted family system, with a tendency to view marriage with greater pessimism and plans for significantly fewer children than the noncohabiting group.

The results of these studies show that increased premarital sexual activity has some correlation with increased pessimism toward marriage and family. Early premarital sexual activity is undoubtedly not causal but rather a link in the chain of unhealthy family relationships modeled during early childhood. Thus it is reasonable to conclude that there is a cyclical relationship between opposite sex relationships observed during childhood and later adolescent and young adult views toward premarital and marital sex.

To summarize the results of studies referred to in this section, the trend is toward viewing persons with moderate premarital sexual experience as more desirable as marriage partners and away from the ideal of "saving oneself" for marriage. Though young people generally may continue to view extramarital sexual activity as inappropriate, those from dysfunctional families appear to have earlier and increased frequency of premarital sexual activity. Further, persons from divorced family systems were shown to be pessimistic toward their own marriages as well as less desirous of having children than persons from intact families. Such results point to a possible link between increased premarital sexual activity among young people and a growing disintegration of the family unit in American culture.

Summary and Conclusions

The impact of current premarital sexual attitudes and behavior on the marital and family planning of young people is but one of a number of conclusions that may be drawn from the literature of the 1980s. This paper has reviewed a wide range of determinants of premarital sexual attitudes and behavior. Each section has offered conclusions which have come from the literature focusing on that particular determinant. This final section draws together some overarching conclusions based on themes developed from the literature. Indicators for future research are also discussed, as well as suggestions for impacting sexual decision-making in young people.

Increased permissiveness

The research over the past 100 years has revealed an overall increase in permissiveness in respect to premarital sexual behavior, as well as a steady decline in the age of first intercourse. In 1979, for example, 38% of 16 year old girls were found to have had coital experience (Zelnick & Kantor, 1980) as compared to 5% in 1953 (Kinsey et al., 1953). These figures may represent both increased sexual behavior at younger ages, as well as increased willingness to admit to engaging in sexual activity.

It is this trend toward increased freedom in discussing sexual activity that perhaps best accounts for the attenuation of the double standard once recognized between men and women regarding premarital sexual behavior (i.e., a more restrictive code for women than for men). Current research seems to underscore that gender is no longer a distinguishing factor in premarital sexual behavior, particularly since the mid-1970s. However, women still tend to endorse more traditional attitudes regarding premarital sex, while at the same time opting increasingly to engage in premarital sex. This implies that society continues to make moral distinctions based on

considerations of gender. Such an observation points to a second trend which emerges from the literature, namely, a trend in the United States toward separation between the attitudes, beliefs and behavior surrounding premarital sex.

Separation of Attitudes and Beliefs

There is a strong suspicion that the rise in sexual permissiveness among adolescents and young adults may be due increasingly to a split between personal attitudes or beliefs and actual behavior. What has been validated from the literature concerning the influence of parents, educators and the church is a trend toward lesser emphasis on developing an internalized set of values regarding sexual behavior and a greater emphasis on offering a set of external "do's and don'ts."

An extensive literature has developed concerning the strong impact that parents have on the sexual attitudes and behavior of adolescents and young adults. The overwhelming conclusion of these studies is that parents are ill-equipped generally to discuss sexuality with their children, or are using ineffective methods such as inculcating guilt and fear to shape children's sexual decision making. Although a high level of sexual guilt appears to decrease sexual activity for a time, it appears that when persons with a high level of guilt become sexually active, they tend to be irresponsible in their use of contraception and generally lack knowledge about sexual relationships.

Such conclusions point to the importance of sex education both at the behavioral and attitudinal levels. There has been much debate as to who is responsible for educating young people about sexual matters. Many researchers have concluded that the schools are taking a disproportionate amount of the responsibility, and are therefore calling for parents to increase

their own level of participation on behalf of the sexual education of their children. Studies have shown that the most profound changes in personal behavior are accomplished at the level of attitudes and beliefs rather than at the behavioral level. Thus it seems in the absence of direct communication regarding sexual values, most young people are left to develop their sexual attitudes subsequent to having become sexually active.

Another indication of a split between premarital sexual attitudes and behavior is in the area of religiosity. It has been noted that 40% of the adults who considered themselves highly religious also considered premarital sex to be acceptable behavior (For the 1st Time, 1985). Thus, there appears to be a trend toward having religious values that exclude sexuality from lifestyle guidelines. Such a trend may encourage an individual toward sexual experimentation without having thought through the consequences of his or her experimentation.

On the basis of such conclusions, there is a need for children to be given explicit training concerning development of healthy attitudes toward sexual behavior. Such training should not focus merely on what to do with their sexuality but also to provide an opportunity to think about and discuss the issues related to sexual relationships. For some children this may be training within a specific religious system, while for others it may merely be an opportunity to talk openly and frankly to their parents about their questions and feelings. In any case, the more important factor is the direct transmission of information that includes both biological and philosophical components. This would allow a young person to explore both the "what" and the "why" of their sexual behavior and thereby help them make better informed decisions about their sexuality.

There is a need as well for research concerning the types and quantity of information being relayed in the school and home environments, with a goal of providing educators and parents with more efficient and effective training. Much in the same way that parents are taught to discuss issues surrounding drug and alcohol abuse with their children, there is a need to train them as well to discuss sexuality and sexual issues. Training may need to focus on parents exploring their own values about sexuality, and also clarifying misconceptions they have about sexuality. This would perhaps be best accomplished for parents when their children are at elementary school age, a time when parents are typically still primary in their child's relationships.

This paper has attempted to review the literature concerning determinants which contribute to premarital sexual atttitudes and behavior in adolescents and young adults. With the focus on the 1980s, a continuation of past trends has been noted, as well as some more recent developments. Research has shown an overall increase in permissiveness for premarital sexual behavior, and a decrease in the age of sexual experimentation. What once appeared to be a gender-based double standard of attitudes and behavior surrounding premarital sex now appears to be an alarming trend of adolescents and young adults separating attitudes and beliefs from behavior in arriving at sexual decisions.

During the adolescent years, peer relationships are now considered to be highly influential in making decisions regarding sexual behavior. Parents' influence appears to have declined as families take less responsibility for training their children in healthy values concerning premarital sexuality and leave the task of sex education to the schools. In the national interest, the effects of these and other factors require major

decisions not only by families but also by those responsible for social planning. High on the agenda should be the need to create dynamic strategies and programs that can help adolescents and young adults make better and healthier decisions about their sexuality.

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